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SUBJECT: DEFENSE DAS RAY'S VISIT TO CAMBODIA REINFORCES
STRONG POW/MIA COOPERATION AND THE U.S.-CAMBODIA
RELATIONSHIP

REF: PHNOM PENH 90

1. (SBU) Summary: Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW and Missing Personnel Affairs Charles A. Ray visited Cambodia from November 3-6, to review ongoing POW/MIA recovery efforts. Discussions included the current state of the U.S.-Cambodia relationship as well as TIP, upcoming elections, the KR Tribunal and Burma. DASD Ray met with PM Hun Sen, senior RGC officials from the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) and Ministry of Interior and members of the press. This was DASD Ray's second successful trip to Cambodia in 2007. DASD Ray previously served as the US Ambassador to Cambodia from 2002-2005.

CAMBODIA: POW/MIA COOPERATION: EXAMPLE TO THE REST OF THE

WORLD

2. (SBU) During his November 5 meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen, DASD RAY expressed his gratitude for the continued cooperation from the RGC on POW/MIA issues. He emphasized to the PM that when he negotiates with other governments on POW/MIA issues he always highlights Cambodia as an example of cooperation on POW/MIA issues. DASD RAY clarified a statement he had made at their last meeting in January 2007. At that time, DASD Ray stated that the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command expected to complete excavating identified incident sites in the next few years. PM Hun Sen took this to mean there would be a reduction in the U.S. accounting effort in Cambodia. DASD Ray noted that if additional sites are identified, the U.S. will request permission to excavate.

In short, the U.S. commitment to the fullest possible accounting will continue in Cambodia. The PM was grateful for DASD Ray's comments and especially for showcasing Cambodia as a model of cooperation on POW/MIA issues. The PM recalled urging the governments of Vietnam and Laos to cooperate in a similar fashion.

3. (SBU) The conversation then turned to the issue of land grabbing. The PM noted that the number of land disputes has decreased. He acknowledged accusations that the rich and powerful were behind land shortages, but said the story was more complex. There has been an increase in the population; large and extended families require more land to survive. The PM said he has started a new campaign in which he will provide a house and two hectares of land to disabled soldiers. The RGC would help build the infrastructure around these areas because "disabled soldiers are the most vulnerable segment of the population."

4. (SBU) DASD Ray informed the PM of his other responsibility to the Secretary of Defense in addition to

POW/MIA recovery, that being personnel recovery and support to civil search and rescue. DASD Ray said the U.S. is working to create an international network of countries that have the capability to work together to provide emergency rescue assistance in the event of natural disasters. DASD Ray used the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami as an example of countries assisting each other after a natural disaster strikes. DASD Ray hoped Cambodia would be an important part of the network and said that the USG was ready to help build the capacity of the RGC to respond to a natural disaster. The PM thanked the U.S. Embassy for the USG's assistance in searching for a missing airplane that crashed earlier this year.

TIP AND ELECTIONS

15. (SBU) DASD Ray praised Hun Sen for his leadership and the RGC for making great strides in combating the dreadful practice of human trafficking. DASD Ray noted that national elections were to be held next July and said that he hoped the elections in 2008 will build upon the achievements of the last national election in 2003. He emphasized that it was important for Cambodia to have a representational system in place. The PM stated he was determined to make the elections better and that the NEC was doing its best. The RGC is trying to provide the NEC with everything they need. For previous elections, the RGC relied on "friends" (donors) for assistance. The PM noted that the RGC can cover 60 percent of the funding for next year's national elections. The RGC is working to institute a national identification card for Cambodians over the age of 15; he expressed his belief that the ID card would assist with registration and the overall election process. Hun Sen said he did not believe there

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would be constitutional issues or violence in Cambodia as compared to the problems Thailand and the Philippines face with elections.

U.S.: BURMA and U.S.- ASEAN SUMMIT

16. (SBU) The PM stated that ASEAN was prepared to talk about Burma and to discuss it with the United States. He suggested the summit would have to be for "ASEAN 9.5" (Burma would only be permitted to send its Foreign Minister) to facilitate discussions. The PM acknowledged that, "ASEAN 10" would not be acceptable to the USG but said "ASEAN 9" would not be acceptable to ASEAN. The PM concluded his remarks on Burma by pointing out that this summit could provide an opportunity for dialog with Burma.

17. (SBU) The PM briefly mentioned the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, but noted that he could not talk about ongoing cases before the court. He explained that he had personally contacted the Governor of Pailin Province before Nuon Chea's arrest. (Pailin Province is a former Khmer Rouge stronghold and Nuon Chea, known as Brother Number Two, was Pol Pot's Deputy.) The PM said he had advised the Governor that he must take responsibility, monitor the situation, and carry out the orders of the court, which included bringing his former comrades to Phnom Penh. It was the intention of the PM to ensure that Cambodian citizens respected the capacity of the government by enlisting the support of the former Khmer Rouge cadres to assist with the detention and transport of Khmer Rouge defendants to Phnom Penh.

18. (SBU) DASD Ray concluded the visit by telling the PM how impressed he was with the progress Cambodia has made, but noting that challenges remain ahead. He stressed that flexibility, creativity and new ideas will be needed to accomplish the POW/MIA accounting mission in Southeast Asia.

19. (SBU) During his visit, DASD Ray also met with the

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sar Kheng; the Chairman of the POW/MIA Committee; visited a POW/MIA recovery site; and spoke with journalists regarding the POW/MIA accounting mission and the evolving US-Cambodia relationship.

Sar Kheng said that the POW/MIA recovery effort is an important humanitarian priority for Cambodia, past, present and future. Sar Kheng commented that Cambodia's full cooperation is without conditions and strictly a humanitarian effort. DASD Ray met with General Pol Saroeun, Chairman of the POW/MIA Committee. DASD Ray mentioned to General Pol the importance of the RCAF restructuring itself. He said reform was important to building support in the U.S. Congress for expanded mutual assistance programs such as military-to-military assistance and emergency search and rescue capability.

¶10. (U) DASD Ray reviewed and approved this cable prior to his departure.
MUSSOMELI